



**Standing on Solid Ground:
Finding your Path along the Challenging Road of Caregiving and Mental Illness**

Seek Knowledge

- Learning about the symptoms of the illness, the potential triggers, the course of the illness, and the treatment options available is a powerful tool to help you find solid ground.
- Learning about the illness can also help you more clearly distinguish between the person and the illness.
- Learning the facts and how your loved one experiences the illness and its symptoms can help you be better prepared and less reactive.
- Getting the facts can help you to distinguish how you might help. Having knowledge of the particular illness can help you to tailor your approach to caring.

What symptoms, triggers, patterns and treatments are you aware of in your loved one?

Where might you turn to gain more knowledge? Examples may include: National Alliance on Mental Illness, Alzheimer's Association, VA PTSD info line, VA health care providers, internet, or your own medical provider.

Attend to Your Emotions

- There are a host of emotions that if left unattended may profoundly impact your thoughts, reactions, and your wellbeing.
- First and foremost your emotions are a powerful source of information. Your emotions can act as a barometer of how you are doing, how stressed you may be, and as a result provide direction for what it is you may need. Recognizing your emotions means you are recognizing your needs and what matters to you.
- Your emotions can provide direction and if properly recognized can help you to be more purposeful and less reactive.

What emotions have you been ignoring?

What purposeful action might you need to take to address how you are feeling?

Identifying Responsibility

- It takes practice to sort out what you may be responsible for versus what others may be responsible for. It takes awareness and practice to identify what is within



your control and what is not. Sorting through who is responsible and finding ways to accept what is in the here and now when you have no control is a skill that can help keep you feeling steady in your caregiving role.

How do I know what my responsibilities are and what they are not?

How do I know when I am trying to control something or someone that is out of my control?

What helps me let go of control, accept what is, and live in the present?

Sharing Your Experience

- Communicating your thoughts and feelings may not change the illness, but it does have great potential to impact the Caregiver. When you are communicating your feelings, your needs, and your requests, you are reinforcing that you matter and creating a bridge of understanding between you and others.

What have I been keeping silent about that I need to share?

Do I need to communicate with someone or set a limit in order take better care of myself?

Finding Support

- Communicating directly with others may positively influence how connected you feel in your journey and how solid you feel in yourself. Think of a time that you shared openly with another, whether sharing an upset with a friend, communicating a clear limit, making a request directly, or asking for help, and remember the feeling or relief, connection, or support that came with it.

Who can you turn to for connection?

Who do you want to add to your list of connections? Examples may include: Caregiver Support Line, Care Support Coordinator, VA staff, a counselor, or any number of others. The list is as endless as your imagination!